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**Theological education for social transformation : a
missiological analysis of core elements in the theology of
John Samuel Pabee**

by/par
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Juin 2012

DECLARATION

I declare that.....

As required by the university regulations, I hereby declare unequivocally that this project, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to....

My uncle Charles D. Kabwe (specifically in my language he is my ‘male-mother’), who raised me like one of his own children and instilled in me the crucial principle of life that is: ‘the struggle for education in Africa is a struggle for justice’.

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ABSTRACT

The study is a critical analysis of John S. Pobee's theological thoughts on theological education in Africa focusing on social transformation. It argues that for theological education to become relevant in the African context, it must be informed by the daily existential experiences of African people on the grassroots. By utilising a missiological analytical research methodology, the study has demonstrated that the mission of God is an all-embracing in which every Christian participates or struggles together with God in the humanization of the society. This means ecumenical imperative in theological education demands a new paradigm, which requires tools for social analysis and models for thinking theologically in order to occasion renewal in the Church for the purpose of social transformation. In this way theological education should be life centred and praxis-oriented. In other words, it is a way of critical participation in an on-going process of recreating and liberating work of God, in which human beings partner with God in the struggle for social transformation. This in itself calls for theological education in Africa, to complement the paradigm of Christocentric universalism with the paradigm of interrelatedness of all life. Finally, articulation of the notion of ecumenism within various African wisdom and philosophy must be perceived crucial for theological education. This is underpinned by an understanding that every human culture has categories and idioms in which the concept of ecumenism can be translated for contextual articulation. This implies that there is an urgent need for empirical studies in different African ethnic groups in order to retrieve indigenous concepts and metaphors of ecumenism.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study offers a missiological perspective on John Samuel Pobee's thinking pertaining to theological education¹ and social transformation in Africa². Pobee is set within the broader context of African Theology³ which is embedded within the African religio-cultural heritage and sociological context. John Mbiti has defined African Theology as "the articulation of the Christian faith by African Christians: both theologians and lay people. Christians ask themselves what their faith means and try to explain or simply live it within the context of their history, culture and contemporary issues"⁴. Clearly, African Theology⁵ is not done in

¹ In this study, theological education is understood as ecumenical theological education. Ecumenical theological education is an education where student across spectrum of churches, cultural ethos, ethic belonging and sometimes religious orientation come together to learn and doing theology. This is called ecumenical learning and it has five characteristics: transcending barriers; orientation towards action; learning in community; learning together; intercultural learning, See Ulrich Becker, "Ecumenical Learning," in Lossky, Nicholas et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2002, 379. It is should be a total and holistic process which integrates these elements and characteristics. The process is not just about changed attitudes and ways of behaving and relating to each other but also an intention of conscientization of the learners about their socio-political and economic circumstances and to deliberately give them skills to go and work for the transformation of their societies.

²The word 'Africa' and everything related to it in this study, refers to the Sub-Saharan African continent and its people. On the one hand, some scholars have argued that one cannot talk of Sub-Saharan African Christian community in singular because of the diversity found in the people. On the other hand, it is cogently observed that despite diversity, there are more similarities that have persisted from pre-colonial times such of culture and religion. Pobee outlines four ways in which the collective African identity manifests in the wholistic understanding of life, communitarian epistemology and ontology, sense of finitude, a clear expression of the reality in songs, dances and rituals, in short ceremonialism. Besides, Sub-Saharan Africans also share similar historical experiences of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Furthermore, the people also share in extreme socio-economic distress, high rates HIV and AIDS and high demography of Christians in the world. This means that there are more concrete similarities than there are divergences. This, in itself makes it possible to talk of African people in singular. Thus, this study will use the phrase in singular to emphasis similarities rather than upholding the differences. See John S. Pobee, "African in Search of Identity," In Reuver, Marc and Huizer, S. Friedhelm (eds.), *The Ecumenical Movement Tomorrow: Suggestions for Approaches and Alternatives*. Kampen Kok Publishing House and Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993, 387-398, 396-397 and Isabel A. Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi*. Blantyre: CLAIM, 1997b, 13.

³John Mbiti has identified three areas of African Theology: oral theology, symbolic theology and written theology and he has broken down written theology into further strands of Cultural Theology, Black Theology, Liberation Theology, African Women's Theologies and Postcolonial Theology. In addition, Tinyiko Maluleke has expanded the list to include: Theologies of the African Initiated Churches (AICs), African Charismatic/Evangelical Theologies, Theology of Reconstruction and Translation Theologies (see John S. Mbiti, "African Theology," In Maimela, Simon and Kong Adrio (eds.), *Initiation into Theology: The Rich Variety of Theology and Hermeneutics*, Pretoria: J L van Schaik Publishers, 1998 141-158, 144.; Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "Half a Century of Africa Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agendas for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Constructive Theology*, no. 99, (November 1997b.), 4-23, 17-23).

⁴Mbiti, "African Theology," 146-154.

⁵The intention of this study is not to go into debates about African Theology. For debates about the subject, see Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (eds.), *African Theology en Route. Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians*, Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1979; Kwesi A. Dickson, "Towards a Theologia Africana," in Mark Glasswell and E. Fashole-Luke (eds.), *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World*, London: SPCK, 1974; Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (eds.), *Biblical Revelation and African*

isolation from the global theological perspective but aims at making Christian faith meaningful and relevant within African religio-cultural and historical experiences.

Pobee is one of such African theologians who have endeavoured to articulate Christian faith within African cultural milieu. His influence and contribution to African theological discourses has transcended far beyond the borders of the continent. Pobee could be numbered as one of the greatest thinkers of African Christianity. He is a Ghanaian Anglican Priest and theologian who was a professor of New Testament and Church History at the University of Ghana. He was born on the 9th July 1937 in the former Gold Coast (now Ghana) and grew up in a family that respected and practiced plurality as integral. The extended family were from various denominations and others from African traditional religion. Thus, the family learnt to talk of their faith in terms of its effect on their lives rather than what it meant to another⁶. He attended primary school at Adisadel College in Cape Coast, from 1950 to 1956 and it was here where he developed strong roots in the Anglican Communion.

Thereafter, he went to the University College of Gold Coast (now University of Ghana) in 1957. At the university, he was introduced to intellectual and academic life by Noel King, a Professor of Divinity with keen interest in politics, which Pobee came to perceived as unavoidable in any community and institutional life⁷. King has had a lasting impact on the intellectual life and approach to Pobee's future involvement in mentoring future leaders. For later in life, Pobee reflected on the conflictive relationship that existed between Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana and the Church, particularly in relation to 'deification' and 'divinization' of Nkrumah himself in *Kwame Nkrumah and the Church in Ghana 1949 – 1966*⁸. The second significant personality in the life of Pobee was Christian Goncalves Baëta, a professor at the University of Ghana and ordained minister in the

Beliefs. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1969. For recent developments and discussions see Maluleke, "Half a Century of Africa Christian Theologies," Jesse N.K Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd, 1995; Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, Edinburgh and Maryknoll: University of Edinburgh Press, Orbis Books, 1995; Isabel A. Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, "African Women's Theologies," in Diane B. Stinton (ed.), *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations*, London: SPCK, 2010, 90-100.

⁶John S. Pobee, "Sense of Grace and Mission," Unpublished Personal Memoir, no date, 1-221, 44.

⁷Pobee, "Sense of Grace and Mission," 15.

⁸John S. Pobee, *Kwame Nkrumah and the Church in Ghana 1949-1966 : a study in the relationship between the socialist government of Kwame Nkrumah, the first prime minister and first president of Ghana, and the Protestant Christian Churches in Ghana*, Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1988.

Ghanaian Evangelical Presbyterian Church, who was his teacher and mentor⁹. Pobee argues that Baëta had an inclusive approach to Christianity and a deep concern for social development which has given Pobee theological grounding and orientation.

Pobee completed his Doctorate of Philosophy in New Testament at Selwyn College, University of Cambridge until 1966 and afterward went back to lecture at the University of Ghana as lecturer in 1966. On the basis of his achievement he went through the ranks of the University as Senior Lecturer in 1972, Associate Professor in 1977 and Full Professor in 1981. He also served as Associate Director of the Humanities Section, Population Dynamics Programme, at Legon from 1976 to 1980, and Dean of the Faculty of Arts from 1979 to 1983 and as Head of the Department for the Study of Religion from 1978 to 1983.

He has also served on the international level as member of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Missionswissenschaft, member of the Board of Scholars of the Life and Peace Institute, Vice President, International Association for Mission Studies (1985-1988). President International Association for Mission Studies (1988-1992). He was also an Olaus Petri Scholar, at the University of Uppsala, Sweden, 1983 and many others. He was then appointed as Associate Director of the Programme on Theological Education (hereafter, PTE) of the World Council of Churches (hereafter WCC), Geneva, Switzerland and later the executive director of the Theological and Ministerial Formation Programme of WCC¹⁰ and when PTE transformed into Ecumenical Theological Education Programme (hereafter, ETE), Pobee became the first Global Coordinator until 1998.

Pobee is a significant church leader and ecumenical theologian and has authored and edited various books and numerous articles¹¹. During his time of serving as the Global Coordinator of ETE, Pobee was significant “as an enabler and conductor of the team”¹² in search of a viable theological education within the ecumenical movement. He was convinced that

⁹John S. Pobee, “Christian Goncalves Kwami Baeta - a Personal Appreciation,” in John S. Pobee (ed.), *Religion in a pluralistic society: essays presented to Professor C. G. Baëta*, Leiden: E.J Brill, 1976, 1-4, 1.

¹⁰Pobee, “Sense of Grace and Mission,” 113; Peter Fulljames, *God and Creation in Intercultural Perspective: Dialogue Between The Theologies of Barth, Dickson, Pobee, Nyamiti and Pannenberg*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993, 63.

¹¹Among main monographs are; *Toward an African Theology*, published by Abingdon (1979); *Christian Faith in an Africa Context*, published by Mambo Press (1992); *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul*, published by the Society of New Testament Monograph Series (1985); *Kwame Nkrumah and the Church in Ghana 1949 – 1966*, published by Asempa Press (1987).

¹²Pobee, “Sense of Grace and Mission,” 115.

theology is not only “reading but doing and living”¹³. A number of areas in which Pobee significantly contributed in theological discourse lie in his unswerving affirmation that theological education must concern itself with ordinary African Christians, in their daily struggle for survival in the world. Secondly, it lies in his contention that ecumenical theological education holds a promise for promoting the principles of a just and inclusive African community (see chapter 3). Pobee¹⁴ himself believes that meaningful theological discourse should transcend confessionals and particularities to embrace the wider community of the Church¹⁵.

There has not been to date any written works on Pobee’s theological thoughts on the significance of theological education¹⁶ in the transformation of society. Second, African theologians have currently realised that the Church is inadequately prepared to deal with the current polarisation and fragmentation (this theme is explored further in chapter 1) that is happening in the African continent,¹⁷ and continues to manifest itself in injustice, gender inequalities, and discrimination against the minority groups of people, ethnic and interreligious violence and denominational conflicts among Christians. In his reflection on the viability of theological education, Pobee made a resounding conclusion that theological education done in an ecumenical context has greater potential for envisioning an alternative inclusive society and also able to help reclaim the dignity and selfhood of African people¹⁸. Hence, the question the study seeks to respond is formulated as follows: *what is the missiological significance of John Samuel Pobee’s understanding of theological education in Africa?* In order to answer this question, it is important to outline the significance and the objectives of the study.

¹³ Pobee, “Sense of Grace and Mission,” 110.

¹⁴ John S. Pobee, *Skenosis: Christian Faith in an Africa Context*, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1992, 146.

¹⁵ The term ‘Church’ with an uppercase ‘C’ is used in this study in a reference to the general Christendom (the catholic or universal Church), with a lowercase ‘c’ is used in reference to a specific denomination or confession.

¹⁶ Throughout this study the term “theological education” is used to refer to all forms of ecumenical education and ministerial formation for both ordained and non-ordained ministry and for the preparation for rigorous research and teaching in theology and religion.

¹⁷ See John S. Pobee, “En Voie Theological Education in Africa,” in Pobee J.S. and Kudadjie J.N. (eds), *Theological Education in Africa: Quo Vadimus?* Geneva: World Council of Churches, Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990, 193; Eunice Kamaara, “Towards Christian National Identity in Africa: A Historical Perspective to the Challenge of Ethnicity to the Church in Kenya,” *Studies in World Christianity*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2010, 126-144, 126-127; Dietrich Werner, “Viability and Ecumenical Perspective for Theological Education in Africa: Legacy and New Beginnings in Ecumenical Theological Education/World Council of Churches,” *Missionalia*, vol. 38, no. 2 (August 2010), 275-293, 276.

¹⁸ See John S. Pobee, *Towards an African Theology*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1979; John S. Pobee, “Sources of African Theology,” in John Parratt (ed), *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, London: SPCK, 1987, 23-28.

This study is important because of its interdisciplinary nature and the fact that it pays a tribute to the son of the African soil who has spent and been spent for the development and the shaping of ecumenical theological reflection in both African and global Christianity. Hence, the objectives of this study are threefold: first, the study analyses the contemporary existential challenges in African context in which Pobee's theological thought is located. Second, it exposes the core elements of Pobee's understanding of theological education that is focused on social transformation. Third, the study analyses the ways in which, Pobee's theological insights can be developed in African theological education for social transformation. This suggests that the study is limited to John S. Pobee's understanding of theological education in the context of social transformation, related to the African context in particular and to non-empirical methodological approach, which means that the study is library based.

This study applies missiological analytical research methodology, a methodology that is systematic, interpretative, evaluative, integrative and ecumenical in its approach. In short, the study is underpinned on David Bosch's integrated inter-disciplinary missiological methodology, which will take into account the dimensions of social analysis and theological reflection¹⁹. Yet through analysis, it becomes clear that ecumenical theological education is not just an instrument of *missio Dei* (mission of the triune God) as Bosch and Stan Nussbaum²⁰ describe it, but also the sign and reflection of the prophetic-praxis nature of the Triune-God. In this sense, the ecumenical theological education prepares the students to fully participate in the *missio Dei* to undo injustice and redo justice. In other words, *missio Dei* as a method in this study is understood as a struggle of God with humanity for the humanization of society.

Accordingly, the study is systematically developed into three chapters. The present introduction is followed by chapter one, which focuses on the relevance of theological education in the African context. This chapter is a sociological analysis of the contemporary situation in African continent, which should inform theological education. Chapter two follows, which deals with John Pobee's understanding of theological education in the context

¹⁹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991.

²⁰ Stan Nussbaum, *A Reader's Guide to Transforming Mission: A Concise, Accessible Companion to David Bosch's Classic Book*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005.

of social transformation. Chapter three is focused on theological education for social transformation and it is basically an evaluation of Pobee's theological thoughts and drawing conclusions with regard to his contributions and continuing relevance of his propositions. With this background in mind, the study then proceeds to discuss some of the African existential challenges underpinning them on current debates for a relevant theological education on the African continent.

CHAPTER ONE

THE RELEVANCE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

We must adopt methods of analysis that disturb the privileges people acquire under the protection of cadres who, in turn, live in the shadow of power. A definitive analysis is the only way to get a clear picture of the reality, which is continuously masked by official reports, and reinforced by myths disseminated in tourist leaflets directed at societies with itch for exotic. Those who lead people to believe that Africans live in the world of conflicts fall back on ideology and ignore reality

Jean-Marc Éla²¹.

1.1 Introduction

In the general introduction, an outline has been given of the way in which this study is systematically developed. It argued that the main interest of this study in John Pobee lies in his nexus between theological education and social transformation. The purpose of the present chapter is to explicate as concise as possible the daily religio-cultural, socio-political and economic challenges faced by African people in neo-colonial Africa. The objective of the chapter is to demonstrate that a more praxis oriented theological education is desperately needed in the continent today more than ever. The chapter is located in some of the debates that have been on the agenda of African theology and have been given serious attention by All African Conference of Church (hereafter, AACC)²². This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section deals with the colonial impact on African identity that largely has resulted in psychological disorientation. The second section deals with the socio-material condition African people are experiencing today. The third section focuses on the challenge

²¹ Jean-Marc Éla, *My Faith as an African*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, 118.

²²The AACC is an ecumenical fellowship with more than 120 million member Christians in 39 African countries with an intention to improve the conditions of Africa people through ministries of advocacy and presence at all levels of the continent. It acts as a *catalyst* of the churches in their struggle against negative existential challenges facing Africa in the postcolonial period. Initially, when AACC was founded in 1963, its critical task was to enable churches accompany the continent in its struggle for freedom from colonialism. World Social Forum, "CARITAS/AACC Ecumenical Platform: The Ecumenical Imperative of the World Social Forum" posted no date, accessed on 12th November 2011, website: <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/83657393/ECUMENICAL-PARTICIPATION-IN-WSF-PROCESS>; 1-47, 25.

of contemporary polarisation and fragmentation in the African continent. Finally, it deals with the issues of gender justice. These issues are interwoven and complex, which makes it difficult to deal with one in isolation from others. Nevertheless, they have an effect and should inform theological education in Africa. It is significant to clarify that the purpose of the analysis below is meant to unveil critical issues that are significant for any relevant theological education in Africa today. Yet it must be borne in mind there are hopes, opportunities and chances that have to be seized by African people.

1.2 Colonialism and Psychological Disorientation

There is no theological education aiming at being relevant and meaningful in contemporary Africa that can be done without considering the issue of African identity. The contemporary African struggle is a struggle for authenticity and identity recovery, which is a fight against the ghost of colonial legacy. It is a struggle to undo what colonialism did to the African psychology, which has proved to be a more demanding task than fighting colonialism itself. It was not just the physical control that colonialism imposed on African people, it was also more a form of domestication of mind. African people lost not just power over their social, political and economic institution to their colonizers²³, but also a loss of positive self-perception.

F. Ebousssi Boulaga has captured very well what happened in the process of uprooting and alienating Africans against themselves through colonialism. He argues that human beings who suffer from a loss of their perception of values, they also lose²⁴ their ability to envision the future. Boulaga further argues that through colonialism, Africans find “themselves essentially “locked out,” lost, strangers to themselves”²⁵. Boulaga is not just talking about physical domination, but a psychological domestication, in which Africans were presented with Christianity at a price of depriving them of their capacity to generate their material and spiritual resources to enable develop their own unique future.

²³ Harvey J. Sindima, *Africa's Agenda: The Legacy of Liberation and Colonialism in the Crisis of African Values*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995, 20.

²⁴ F. Ebousssi Boulaga, *Christianity Without Fetishes: An African Critique and Recapture of Christianity*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, Translated from French by Robert R Barr, 1984,19.

²⁵ Boulaga, *Christianity Without Fetishes*, 17.

Donald Baker argues that any process of total domination goes through three levels: coercion and reward; dependence; and thought control²⁶. In the first stage, the powerful utilises military tactics or coercive force to gain control. Secondly, they use psychological and material means to tame the dominated into a relationship in which their wellbeing and future depend on those who dominate them including economic and political systems²⁷. Thought and mind control is the third level and the most brutal mode of domination. Here, people are uprooted and disoriented by imposing on them a different values system until they become obsessed with foreign cultural ethos to the extent of scorning and despising their own cultural values and institutions. Harvey Sindima observes that this disorientation begins by corrupting every value system of the people and making them vulnerable and defenceless, thereafter conditioning and making them perpetual dependents²⁸. This scenario seems suited to the process that African people have experienced through colonial domination and exploitation.

The foregoing discussion fits well in Engelbert Mveng's notion of "anthropological poverty"²⁹. He argues that African contact with colonialism and imperialism fundamentally altered the African's self-perception of world or 'being-ness' and reducing them to "a thing" in history. This occurred at both politico-socio-economic level as poverty of "what we have", and at religio-cultural level, as the poverty of "who we are"³⁰. Thus, for Mveng, "anthropological poverty" is a general impoverishment of African people that colonialism and imperialism brought about through the loss of their identity and creativity diminishment. It "indiscriminately disrupted" their communal solidarity and halted their development through destruction of indigenous values, religio-cultural heritage³¹. This relates very well with Kā Mana's concept of broken *imaginaire*³², a view that "contemporary life in Africa, a

²⁶ Donald Baker is cited in Sindima, *Africa's Agenda*: 60.

²⁷ Sindima, *Africa's Agenda*: 60.

²⁸ Sindima, *Africa's Agenda*: 60.

²⁹ Engelbert Mveng, "Impoverishment and Liberation. A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World," in Rosino Gibellini (ed.), *Paths of African Theology*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994, 155-165, 156.

³⁰ Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993, 38.

³¹ Mveng, "Impoverishment and Liberation. A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World,"

³² Kā Mana has outlined eleven "mega-crises" which remain as implanted on the minds and affect all Africa as result of their contact with colonialism and imperialism as follows: striking images and impressions of a continent in crisis (Africans portray themselves with negative image in the global human family), the notion of insignificance, their innate shallowness, their appalling triviality, their inner emptiness, their senseless logic, their fundamental absurdity, their human mediocrity, their hopeless duplicity, the problem of inconsistency and destroying our self-worth. The Kā Mana crisis is not a crisis but chaos and though he proposes the redemption of African *imaginaire* through the work of Christ as a way forward, the pathological nature of the problems demand more than that, especially that the essence of people's *imaginaire* is to a large extent embed in their culture. Kā Mana could have done well by underpinning his concept on social world-views, patterns of thoughts

natural wholeness has been broken, a natural unity fragmented, and natural relations impaired”³³. For Kä Mana, the presence of colonialism stalking Africans' imagination is “pathological”, for the colonialist project has succeeded in implanting its ethos into the psychology of African people³⁴. Mveng like Kä Mana believes that “the ravage” of colonialism and imperialism is now maintained by economic and cultural neo-colonialism³⁵. In other words, the bitter experiences of powerlessness and suffering inherited from the systemic forces of colonialism have been perpetuated by ruling class and elites.

It is crucial issues like this, which demand a theological education that can reorient African people. Relevant theological education should be tailored to debunk the myths of colonisation and establish cultural reality as a framework for future action by reclaiming African value systems to envision an alternative future (see chapter 3).

1.3 The Socio-Material Distress

The majority of African theologians³⁶ remain baffled at the paradoxical nature of the African continent. The majority of African theologians³⁷ have wondered why Christianity which has been a force of social progress and has been accepted in unprecedented manner does not seem to be helping the continent battling against abject poverty and disease. Jesse Mugambi laments that Africa remains “a continent that produces what it does not consume, consumes what it does not produce”³⁸. The extreme poverty Africa has been experiencing is complex and is perpetuated by the continent’s historical harrowing cultural, economic and political disintegration. What is even more baffling is the fact that out of the alarming food shortage in Africa, vast markets have continued to be fed during colonialism to the present and the

that formed the African indigenous *imaginaire*. African theology is an attempted to redeem African indigenous *imaginaire* with a clear understanding that culture is not static or monolithic but continues to evolve, yet it is crucial for personal identity which is a critical aspect of the notion of *imaginaire*. Kä Mana would have done well to clarify the *imaginaire* that African people need to redeem. See Kä Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa Envisioning the Future: Salvation in Christ and the Building of a New African Society*, Yaounde: Cle and Regnum Africa, 2002, 8-17.

³³Cited in Valentin Dedji, “The Ethical Redemption of African Imaginaire: Ka Mana's Theology of Reconstruction,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 31, Fasc. 3 (Aug., 2001), 254-274, 158.

³⁴Dedji “The Ethical Redemption of African Imaginaire: Ka Mana's Theology of Reconstruction,” 260.

³⁵Mveng, “Impoverishment and Liberation. A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World,” 156.

³⁶ See for instance, Éla, *My Faith as an Africa*, xvi; Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003, 43; Emanuel Katongole, “‘A Different World Right Here, A World Being Gestated in the Deeds of the Everyday’: The Church with African Theological Imagination,” *Missionalia*, vol. 30, no. 2, (August 2002), 206-234, 219.

³⁷Katongole, “‘A Different World Right Here,” 219.

³⁸ Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, 43.

industry of the “misery continues to prosper”³⁹. Pobee laments that “the greater injustice is that....the poorer third world [sic] nations are financing the richest on an unprecedented scale”⁴⁰. This has been propelled by neo-colonial corruption and injustice.

The Cameroonian sociologist, Axelle Kabou, questioned *And What If Africa Refused Development?*⁴¹ She argues that the political use of negritude, which celebrates Africanity, to a large extent, feed African dictatorships with its ideologies of “authenticity” that outlawed Western business suits and Christian names, and expropriated, then bled to death foreign-owned businesses in the cause of national sovereignty⁴². Kabou seems to have underestimated the more subtle colonial ideologies that are specifically intended to disrupt the psyche of African people. She has side-lined those vicious ideologies that saw no value in African culture which incubated and hatched contemporary neo-colonial African dictators.

One can contend that affirming one’s Africanness is essential for building identity in Africa and is not equivalent with affirming tyrannical rulers. What remains true is the fact that Africa, besides its richness and potentials is also consumed by bitterness, and threatened by the clutches of famine, HIV and AIDS, ecological disintegration, ethnic, civil wars, which have been a threat to the whole of life. The social problem of health in African context is getting worse. Looking at the high numbers of people affected and dying from AIDS related illnesses one can see the cruelty of neoliberal capitalist systems, which are tailored to fill the bellies of the minority, who feed on misery of the excluded masses of the people. These issues have led to marginalization and discrimination of African people in the world. They are constantly perceived like people condemned to be exterminated from the face of the earth. Socio-material distress need not continue being accepted as a norm in Africa. It seems responding to the plight of the socio-materially distressed people is the first and indispensable duty for African theological education. As Daniel Schipani indicates the socio-material distressed people “constitute not only the context and starting point but are the privileged

³⁹ Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War*, Nairobi: East African Education Publishers, 1995, 160; Éla, *My Faith as an Africa*, xvi.

⁴⁰ John S. Pobee, “Equipping People of God for God’s Mission,” *International Review of Mission*, vol. 81, issue, 321, (January 1992), 21-31, 24.

⁴¹ Axelle Kabou, *Et si l’Afrique refusait le développement?*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 1991.

⁴² Axelle Kabou cited in Howard W. French, “The World: An Ignorance of Africa As Vast as the Continent,” posted on November 20, 1994, accessed on 9th February 2012, website: <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/11/20/weekinreview>, 1994.

interlocutor of the theologians”⁴³. Thus, theological education cannot afford to remain apolitical like in some Pentecostal and Evangelical circles⁴⁴ and take other-worldly orientation that has almost nothing to do with the socio-material struggles of people in this world. Theological education must take a holistic approach which brings together sound biblical grounding, rootedness in the tradition of the church, and conscientizing student about the circumstances of their society and equip them with skills that can help in the transformation the structures of their society.

1.4 The Challenge of Plurality

Africa is a beacon of plurality. Here plurality refers to a condition of the existence of more than one religious community, ideology, and ethnic group in a society. Diversity has always been part of African cultural and religious ethos. The continent is diverse at every level be it in religions, amongst Christians themselves, ethnic groups, cultures, and races. This account of plurality has become a central question for the articulation of contemporary African Christian identity. On the one hand, plurality is valuable as a mechanism against mono-ideological orientation; on the other hand, there is also a dark side to it, which manifests itself in precarious polarization and fragmentation of society.

The scandal of contemporary fragmentation of Africa is one of the main concerns in the continent. Effective accommodation of diversity remains central and a challenging process for the African continent. Apparently, even the African Church does not seem to be fully equipped to handle plurality. The Church is concerned about the ever-growing fragmentation and an aggressive assertion of ethnic identities in Africa today⁴⁵. Africa is in a situation where no one knows how to deal with the issue of diversity except to envision a new way of looking at the world. Indeed, religious plurality, in most cases exacerbated by religious manipulation for political purposes is becoming another threat to the wellbeing of the continent. The continent is under a bombshell. There is no single day that passes by without hearing of civil strife and conflicts, which are frequently perpetuated by opposing religious

⁴³ Daniel S. Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology*, Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1988, 216.

⁴⁴See Allan Anderson, “Pentecostal-Charismatic Spirituality and Theological in Europe from a Global Perspective,” *PentecoStudies*, vol. 3, no. 1, (2004), 1-15, accessed on 14th March 2012, website: http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/aanderson/Publications/forgotten_dimension.htm.

⁴⁵Kamaara, “Towards Christian National Identity in Africa,” 126-127.

fundamentalists in the name of loyalty to their religious ideology⁴⁶. One is also aware that some of these conflicts such as ethnicity are aggravated by socio-political and economic inequality. In such a context, theological education is being called upon to concern itself with empowering African people for social reconstruction⁴⁷ and building a peaceable Africa for all⁴⁸. Theological education as an instrument of God's mission has a responsibility to work toward social-inclusive nation-building by promoting positive traits of diversity and co-existence in the continent.

1.5 Gender Inequality

Most African theologians⁴⁹ have generally accepted that because of gendered power relations, women pay the disproportionate cost of all the challenges that the African continent is facing. Nahla Valji laments that there is no inequality more pervasive, both vertically and horizontally across the African continent than gender inequality⁵⁰. Majority of African women are still the most marginalised and socially excluded from global economic systems. In fact, they are the ones who mostly bear greater consequences of ecological degradation and are the most affected by HIV and AIDS. Because of the feminization of poverty and gender inequality, women are particularly vulnerable to infection by HIV and AIDS. African women theologians⁵¹ have connected “the question of gender and the powerlessness of women” with HIV and AIDS. They argue that “the powerlessness of women in Culture, economics and Religion has a direct impact on their vulnerability to HIV infection”⁵². In addition, the dominant ideology of patriarchy as propagated by African culture and the Bible has kept the majority of African women excluded from the socio-economic and political

⁴⁶Ragnhild Nordås. “Identity Polarization and Conflict: State Building in Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana,” Paper prepared for the 49th International Studies Association Convention, San Francisco, CA. March 26-29, 2008. Panel WB34 “Building Peace in Africa,” posted no date, accessed on 13th November 2011, website: http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/ISA_identitypolarizationconflict.pdf, 2008 21.

⁴⁷See Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A theology of reconstruction: Nation-building and human rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*; Kä Mana, *Christians and churches of Africa envisioning the future*.

⁴⁸ David C. Woolman, “Educational Reconstruction and Post-Colonial Curriculum Development: A Comparative Study of Four African Countries,” *International Education Journal*, vo. 2, no. 5, (2001), 27-46, 32.

⁴⁹ John S. Pobee (ed.), *Culture, Women and Theology*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1994; John S. Pobee and Bärbel von Wartenberg-Potter, (eds.), *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women of the Third World*, Oak Parks: Meyer Stone Books, 1987.

⁵⁰Nahla Valji, “Gender Justice and Reconciliation” Dialogue on Globalization, Occasional Paper no. 35, (November), 2007, Posted no date, accessed on 13th November, website: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/05000.pdf>, 1-24, 5.

⁵¹ Sarojini Nadar, “Contextual Theological Education in Africa and the Challenge of Globalization,” *Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 59, No. 2-3, (April-July), 2007, 235-241, 240.

⁵²Nadar, “Contextual Theological Education in Africa and the Challenge of Globalization,” 240.

development⁵³. Thus, a relevant theological education has a responsibility to apply itself to the question of gender justice⁵⁴ in African continent.

1.6 Implication for Theological Education

The above existential circumstances of the African people suggest that they are the primary locus for doing theology. Theological education in Africa cannot afford to be only a mind game to satisfy intellectual curiosity of the elite. It cannot afford to base its reflection only on abstract and ontological questions that respond to questions that no one is asking. It must also affirm the contextual issues as its theological locus, and its conscious articulation of a theology of solidarity as a definitive of both praxis and reflection. According to Schipani, “theological inquiry and reflection must correlate with involvement and participation in the actual historical setting of alienation, marginalization, and oppression within which the church is to adopt a new shape and orientation”⁵⁵. Taking somehow a slightly different view, Éla argues for theological education to “adopt methods of analysis that disturb the privileges people acquire under the protection of cadres who, in turn, live in the shadow of power”⁵⁶. This becomes a way of living faith in actual situations of the excluded. This implies that knowledge must be discerned in the light of historical reality of the people. The context seems to demand that theological education be illuminated by existential realities of the people not just as an effort to explain them, justify them, or to investigate their compatibility with the facts of the divine relation, but as an effort to confront and eliminate negative realities⁵⁷. In other words, the existential challenges of African people should be the locus from which theological education in Africa has to be done.

⁵³ Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, Maryknoll: Orbis Book, 1995.

⁵⁴ Pam Spees defines gender justice as “the protection and promotion of civil, political, economic and social rights on the basis of gender equality. It necessitates taking a gender perspective on the rights themselves, as well as the assessment of access and obstacles to the enjoyment of these rights for both women, men, girls and boys and adopting gender-sensitive strategies for protecting and promoting them”.

See Pam Spees, “Gender Justice and Accountability in Peace Support Operations,” International Alert, (February), 2004, posted no date, accessed on 13th November 2011, website: http://www.international_alert_2004_gender_justice_accountability_peace_operations_3.pdf, 1-36, 9.

Gender as a concept has little to do with the biological categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’. Rather it is about the social roles ascribed to men and women. Incorporating a gender analysis renders visible underlying power relations in society in order to expose what is valued and what is marginalized; and how these assumptions and hierarchies, if ignored, can fundamentally distort what might otherwise be well intentioned policy prescriptions.

⁵⁵ Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology*, 217.

⁵⁶ Éla, *My Faith as an African*, 118.

⁵⁷ Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology*, 220.

1.7 Conclusion

The purpose of the present chapter was to explicate as concise as possible some of the existential challenges faced by contemporary African people in neo-colonial Africa. It argues that for theological education to become relevant in the African context, it has to be informed by the daily experiences of the people on the grassroots. In addition, it demonstrates that a more praxis oriented theological education is crucial in the continent today more than ever. In the light of these challenges, it is significant to analyse the theological contribution of John Pobee to theological education in Africa that is underpinned by social transformation. Hence, in the following chapter I will expose the core elements that underpin Pobee's theological thoughts in relation to theological education and social transformation.

CHAPTER TWO

JOHN SAMUEL POBEE'S PERSPETIVE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

“....fullness of life in a continent beset by poverty, marginalisation, brutal injustice etc cannot but be concerned with how to put body and soul together in everyday living; it cannot but be concern with systematic factors – whether sociological or economic etc. – which in diverse ways contribute towards people’s unpleasant and unfortunate circumstances... the theme makes claim that theology, the God-word or the science of religion has something to do with fullness of life, either by being a factor in denial or diminishing of life in its abundance or fostering and enhancing life”

John S Pobee⁵⁸.

2.1. Introduction

Having outlined some of the existential challenges confronting African people in contemporary society, arguing that theological education can only be considered relevant if it applies itself to the existential question of the people, I would now like to shift the focus to the theological thinking of John Samuel Pobee on the question of theological education in Africa. The central task of this chapter is to expose some of the core elements of Pobee’s explication of theological education that is focused on social transformation. The African continent floats in a locus in which inequality based on knowledge is a major challenge to social emancipation of the excluded masses of people. This is a state in which, theological education only cannot be looked to for solving social and economic problems but can be perceived as one instrument for social transformation. Specifically in this chapter, I will expose and analyse some of Pobee’s selected works within his theological context.

2.2. Doing Theological Education in Context

Angies Pears observes that theologians have always been influenced by their context and to a varying degree some have consciously demonstrated an awareness of the influence their context exerted on their theological reflection⁵⁹. As highlighted in the general introduction to the study, one such theologian with clear awareness of his context of theologizing is Pobee.

⁵⁸John S. Pobee, “Theology in the Context of Globalization,” *Ministerial Formation*, no.78, (October, 1997), 18-26, 18.

⁵⁹Angies Pears, *Doing Contextual Theology*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010, 9.

Pobee developed much of his theological thoughts within his own ethnic group, the Akan people of Ghana⁶⁰. He observed that without a concrete underpinning of theological reflection on the context, theological education can become irrelevant and an instrument of ideological manipulation leading to the diminishing of life in its abundance⁶¹. In this instance, theological education can be said to be nothing but a tool of oppression and life denying. Thus, Pobee demands that “theological students should be equipped with social sciences methods to enable them face the cultural realities of their contexts”⁶². Pobee is also aware that positive affirmation of African culture is not equivalent to uncritical acceptance of every aspect of the culture. Accordingly, theological education should operate in conscious and deliberate genuine dialogue with African culture and religion. Pobee stresses that a liberating theological education is the one that emerges out of the concrete awareness of the context which leads to the development of theology in the community. Here the context is not only the locus or the shaping influence for theological education but it should also influence the shaping of theological education and response. This means that any life centred theological education should emerge in the context of those in need of liberation, thus making it a communal process. This is often called the “theology by the people”⁶³ because it is not theologians articulating theology for the people but the people themselves are articulating a theology for themselves in relation to their specific situations and needs. In this sense, the theologians are placed firmly within the community as part of this theological articulating community.

2.3. Conceptualising Theological Education

Pobee, like the majority of African theologians⁶⁴, is also concerned with explicating theological education in Africa within the reality of African traditional wisdom and ethos of education. He emphasised that theological education in Africa should not start with *tabula rasa*⁶⁵. This means that for theological education to be authentic and relevant, it must be translated and expressed within African idioms and categories. In his article, contributed to the Consultation on Theological Education in Africa held in Ghana in 1986, Pobee argues

⁶⁰ John S. Pobee, *Toward An African Theology*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1979, 19.

⁶¹ Pobee, “Theology in the Context of Globalization,” 18.

⁶² Pobee, “En Voie Theological Education in Africa,” 202.

⁶³ Samuel A. Amirtham & John S. Pobee (eds.), *Theology by the People: reflections on doing theology in community*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986.

⁶⁴ John S. Mbiti, “Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church,” in Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (eds.), *Third World Theologies, Mission Trends no.3*, New York: Paulist Press, 1976, 6-18; Bolaji Idowu, *Towards An Indigenous Church*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

⁶⁵ Pobee, *Skenosis*, 131.

that theological education is the “discipline which through participation in and reflection on the good news of God’s activity in the world culminating in Christ seeks” to articulate it in clearest and most coherent language available⁶⁶. In another article entitled, *En Voie Theological education in Africa*, he extrapolated his understanding of theological education more concretely from the reality of the excluded voices in society. He contends that theological education “is the reflection and articulation by real human beings of their hopes and fears”⁶⁷. It is clear that for Pobee relevant theological education does not just emerge from the context of the excluded people but also finds its meaning in responding to their concrete needs. In other words, although the excluded African people have fears connected with the difficult circumstances they live in, yet they are not without hope. Thus, the task of theological education is to empower them so that they are enabled to walk through their fears and envision a hoped future.

This theme runs like a thread throughout Pobee’s theological reflection on theological education. His understanding of education was influenced from the existential issues in the African context. Affirmably, Pobee challenges that “theological education cannot become an accomplice or accessory in the resurgence of any form of sectionalism but must foster wholeness of peoples and societies, of the Church as the state; it should foster an inclusive community”⁶⁸. He explicates education as a “revelation of truth about human life and society”⁶⁹. It is a way every human society passes on its accumulated knowledge and insights to its members to enable them ensure the continuity of the community⁷⁰. Yet Pobee is not talking about any other kind of education but an education whose subject matter, orientation and essence is theology. Accordingly, Pobee believes that the task of theology in Africa is to “scientifically” identify “the good news”, “reconstruct and repair a holistic Christocentric world-view”⁷¹ a subject, which becomes the grounding of his theological reflection (see chapter 3.2).

⁶⁶ John Pobee, “Theological Trends in Africa Today,” in Pobee J.S. and Kudadjie J.N. (eds), *Theological Education in Africa: Quo Vadimus?* Geneva: World Council of Churches, Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990, 55.

⁶⁷ Pobee, “En Voie Theological Education in Africa,” 193.

⁶⁸ Pobee, “En Voie Theological Education in Africa,” 201.

⁶⁹ Pobee, “Theological Trends in Africa Today,” 55.

⁷⁰ Pobee, “Theological Trends in Africa Today,” 56.

⁷¹ Pobee, “Theological Trends in Africa Today,” 55.

Pobee laments that African theological education today is programmed on Western epistemologies, which has nothing to do with African experiences⁷². He observes that some Western scholars have argued that traditional African education was informal, unstructured and non-scientific⁷³. Pobee argues that traditional education had structures, which related harmoniously with other structures in society. It harmonized well with the needs, interests and aspirations of the society. He adds on that, “traditional African education was a process of making a new person and acquiring a new way of life”⁷⁴. Since African people perceive life in its totality, education was tailored for the wellbeing and survival of the community. This does not imply that African traditional education as ‘community orientedness’ lacked personal creativity. For personal creativity, just like any other personal liberties within African community, was promoted as beneficial only to the extent it served the well-being of the individual within the life of the community. This was a mechanism to overcome individualism and selfishness⁷⁵.

Pobee identifies three principles of African traditional philosophy and ethos of education. First, knowledge was from the senses, reason, intuition and tradition. Second, it was pragmatic in approach – practical experience was gained through observation, imitation and participation. In other words, there was a level of scientific orientation in traditional African education system. Third, it was oral and to that extent limited⁷⁶. Despite the limitation because it was oral, it was in some ways rich, broad and suited to the needs of the community since it was holistic. Thus, Pobee believes that theological education is “essentially translatable”⁷⁷ into African culture, or as *skenosis*. This means that African religion and culture should be taken as a significant interpretive framework of theological education in Africa so that it can bear an unmistakeable African stamp.

2.4. The Skenosis Nature of Theological Education

Instead of utilising the concept of contextualisation, Pobee essentially prefers to apply *skenosis* in theologizing, the terminology he coined from the Greek word *skenoo*, which

⁷² Pobee, *Skenosis*, 136-138.

⁷³ Pobee, *Skenosis*, 136.

⁷⁴ Pobee, *Skenosis*, 136.

⁷⁵ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969.

⁷⁶ Pobee, *Skenosis*, 138

⁷⁷ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995.

means “a tent, a dwelling, abode, or lodging”⁷⁸. The imagery is taken from John 1:14, “the word (Greek: *logos*) became flesh (Greek: *sarx egeneto*) and lived for a while among us (Greek, *eskēnōsen in hēmin*)”⁷⁹. Pobee elaborates that *sarx*, flesh, designates the transient or being located in a particular limited earthly dimension. It is contingent in that Jesus was bound in time within a specific religio-cultural, socio-political and economical circumstance. He claims that by using this concept, he easily navigates the problem of misinterpretation and misunderstanding embedded in the word contextualization, because *Skenosis* means “the tabernacling of the non-negotiable Gospel of Christ in different contexts”⁸⁰.

Skenosis becomes a central concept that marks Pobee’s theological reflection. He argues that the merit of this term is that it does not lose sight of the eternal Gospel of Christ, which is to be translated and at the same time emphasizes its expression in a real and specific cultural control⁸¹. He feels that this approach safeguards the Gospel from being watered down and it is truly biblical and in tune with translating the eternal “non-negotiable” word of God into real African context⁸². Thus theological education as *Skenosis* speaks of its ability to translate across cultures, time and space, and expressed in real and specific situations of the African context⁸³. In this regard, Pobee appeals to Éla’s assertion that the confrontation between the Gospel and the African situation must be meaningful in the context of the excluded people from the centres of privileges to transform the lives of African Christians. “There is an urgent need to reject present Western models of expression if we are to breathe new life into the Spoken Word”⁸⁴. Éla believed that one of the major tasks of African Theology was to reformulate how Christian faith is lived out through the mediation of African culture by offering inculturated liturgy. Basing on that argument, Pobee believes that *Skenosis* as a paradigm is an adequate response to the contemporary situation of African people. Having established this *skenoo* foundation of theological education in Africa, Pobee safely argues that “the practice of *tabula rasa*, which put Africans in a North Atlantic captivity, well intentioned as it may have been, is wrongheaded”⁸⁵. The implication of this is that *Skenosis* theological education is only possible when African Christianity, in some ways

⁷⁸ Pobee, *Skenosis*, 38

⁷⁹ Pobee, “Equipping People of God for God’s Mission,” 25.

⁸⁰ Pobee, “En Voie Theological Education in Africa,” 193.

⁸¹ Pobee, *Skenosis*, 39.

⁸² Pobee, *Skenosis*, 40; Éla, *My Faith As An African*, 44.

⁸³ Pobee, “Equipping People of God for God’s Mission,” 25.

⁸⁴ Pobee, *Skenosis*, 57.

⁸⁵ Pobee, “Equipping People of God for God’s Mission,” 26; Pobee, *Skenosis*, 40.

disengages itself from a complete control by Western theological captivity and envisions its own distinctive theological journey.

2.5. “North Atlantic Legacy Re-Theology”

Already in his early and classic book, *Toward an African Theology*, Pobee had given a clear orientation of his theological thought. He argued that Western colonialism and imperialism compromised theological education in Africa. He felt that by the fact that theological education in sub-Saharan Africa was introduced by the North Atlantic, it naturally became a duplication of the Western theological epistemologies and hardly any positive value taken from African wisdom and ethos⁸⁶. In his most recent article, “Stretch Forth Thy Wings and Fly,” Pobee reinstated that “theology in Africa began with a North Atlantic paradigm and artefacts, which also short-changed African identity, ethos, use and creativity”⁸⁷. He identifies four models of this legacy that he perceives to be an antithesis to African world-view. The first model was the introduction of enlightenment culture, which was based on the maxim, “I think, therefore I am”. This maxim reflects the Western epistemology and ontology, which is rationality and individualism. This in itself is divergent to the African epistemology that finds meaning in relationships. Like some other cultures, for African people, theology is not an abstract principle but participation and experience of a relational God. Pobee laments that though there is a growing consciousness that this legacy needs a revision, review and lay to rest once and for all, it still holds a grip on the minds of the majority of African seminaries and university departments⁸⁸. Second, the introduction of individualism was an antithesis of African traditional communitarian epistemology⁸⁹. He felt that Western theological education has tended to focus on producing individualist professional and educated clergy who are unable to be relevant in their social context. Third, the introduction of dichotomy between theology and spirituality was a divergence from African spirituality, which does not put a sharp distinction between spirituality and the secular. This means that theology in Africa must engage the word of God with social,

⁸⁶ John S. Pobee, “Mission, Paternalism, and the Peter Pan Syndrome,” in Philip Turner and Frank Sugeno (eds.), *Crossroads are for Meeting: Essays on Mission and the Common Life of the Church in Global Society*, Sewanee: SPCK, 1986c, 48.

⁸⁷ John S. Pobee, “‘Stretch Forth Thy Wings and Fly’: Theological Education in the African Context,” in Werner, Dietrich et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Theological Education in the World Christianity: Theological Perspectives – Ecumenical Trends – Regional Surveys*, Regnum: Regnum Books International, 2010, 337-345, 338.

⁸⁸ Pobee, “‘Stretch Forth Thy Wings and Fly’,” 338.

⁸⁹ Pobee, “‘Stretch Forth Thy Wings and Fly’,” 339.

economic and political issues⁹⁰. Fourthly, the monopoly tendency in which Christianity was introduced has contributed to the perpetuation of conflict and instability in Africa⁹¹. This in itself increased religious tensions and conflicts, which sporadically has resulted in bloodshed.

Pobee therefore, argues that “in the African context, if there is to be a serious and deep communication and the rooting of the gospel of Christ, the African stamp will have to replace the European stamp”⁹². This implies that giving theological education an African expression in essence and orientation is crucial because theological education “is not abstruse speculation, an academic game, running the danger of raising and answering questions, which no one asks”⁹³. The need here is for each African cultural context to translate theological education into genuine African categories and thought forms⁹⁴. It is this passion for an authentically African theological education that lingers through Pobee’s theological reflection on theological education in Africa. Until theological education is freed from Western epistemologies, it cannot be regarded as African and if it is not incarnated into African culture, it cannot adequately respond to African existential situation. In fact, Pobee lays blame for denominationalism at the feet of the North Atlantic captivity. He argues that “the North Atlantic captivity of the churches in Africa is manifested *inter alia* as the persistence of denominationalism”⁹⁵. Though the European historical theological conflict that engendered the denominational syndrome had nothing to do with African people, denominationalism has been exported to Africa through the missionary activities. This is not simply a reaction against Western theological epistemologies, but rather, a profound cognizance that all theological reflections bear a distinctive stamp of the context that informed them and consequently, they are tailored to respond to particular contextual needs. It is this context that informs the orientation of the *Missio Dei*.

2.6. Theology Serves *Missio Dei*

If mission is God’s mission and theology is the God-talk, then theological education is an aspect of God’s mission⁹⁶. God is a missionary God, who struggles with human beings in order to create a just and equitable society. Indeed, if theology serves the mission of God,

⁹⁰ Pobee, “‘Stretch Forth Thy Wings and Fly’,” 339.

⁹¹ Pobee, “‘Stretch Forth Thy Wings and Fly’,” 340.

⁹² Pobee, *Toward An African Theology*, 17.

⁹³ Pobee, *Toward An African Theology*, 27.

⁹⁴ Pobee, *Toward An African Theology*, 17-18

⁹⁵ John S. Pobee, “En Voie Theological Education in Africa,” 197.

⁹⁶ Pobee, “Equipping People of God for God’s Mission,” 25.

then theological education must be tailored for all the people of God. Citing Sam Amirtham, Pobee urges for theological education to equip the African Church to comprehend its role as an agent of God's mission in its particular context. It must equip the African Church to respond efficaciously to social-material distress, the challenge of plurality, the struggle for human dignity and Christian identity⁹⁷. Pobee contends that the perspective of WCC⁹⁸ with regard to theological education and reflection is that theology is not only an abstract and ontological scientific quest, but serves the Church in its participation in the *Missio Dei*. Pobee seems to be dealing with one phase in the history of the ecumenical movement. Probably, in a context of plurality like Africa, there is a need to move to notions like mission as dialogue. The mission is entrusted by God not to some special people but to "the whole people of God" and this means that theological education should be concerned with the whole Church of God⁹⁹.

This mission is not only converting souls for the heavenly kingdom but an engagement with God in struggle for humanization of society. Pobee argues that theological education is not merely teaching a set of courses or providing some professional skills for ordained ministry. It is rather an invitation to community of faith to develop a critical consciousness of society and to evolve a prophetic response to the challenges of their context. It is an initiation into passion about the *Missio Dei* in concrete historical struggles of people, of faith reflection upon the context and developing a life-style of being partners with God in personal and social transformation¹⁰⁰.

Pobee and Bosch¹⁰¹ identify aspects of social transformation. First, social transformation is holistic. It is holistic in the sense that it touches every aspect of humanity as a whole. It must be perceived in terms of liberation and human dignity in the spheres of politico-economical, socio-cultural and religious systems. Second, it happens at both individual and communal levels. Humanity is created for community and fellowship and therefore, social

⁹⁷ Pobee, "En Voie Theological Education in Africa," 210.

⁹⁸ Pobee, "'Stretch Forth Thy Wings and Fly'," 344.

⁹⁹ Pobee, "Equipping People of God for God's Mission," 28.

¹⁰⁰ Christopher Duraisingh cited in John S. Pobee, "European as a Locus Theologicus," *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 45, Issue 2, (April 1993), 194–201, 196.

¹⁰¹ John S. Pobee and David Bosch, "Workshop: The Bible and Human Transformation," *Mission Studies*, vol. 2, Issue 1, (1985), 67-70, 68-69.

transformation is incomplete if it touches only an individual, it must be experienced by the “community together experiencing liberation, dignity and the Beatific Vision”¹⁰².

Third, social transformation is a lifelong process that demands the Church’s continued struggle with God in every aspect of human life both moral and spiritual in order to humanize society. “It is spiritual not in some otherworldly sense; it is not to opt out of this world; rather it means redeeming everything for Christ, doing everything to the purpose and ends of God”¹⁰³. This means that social transformation can only be occasioned in the light of the liberating Christ. Fourth, because it is occasioned in the light of Christ, social transformation is “a gift of God”. In other words, it is worked and achieved by God; human beings yield and cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

Thus, it can be said that social transformation is a “remodelling on Jesus the servant-Lord”. For Pobee, this understanding of social transformation, “demands a new paradigm in theological formation, which in turn will require tools for social analysis and models for thinking theologically and ethically about that analysis, as well as a renewed curriculum including all contextual theologies, ministries, spiritualities and religious heritages”¹⁰⁴. He calls this the “mission from below”,¹⁰⁵ a mission of the excluded, in which they are empowered to respond meaningfully to challenges, community resources and realise their potential and their own destiny.

Evidently, Pobee is not talking about mission as an-other-worldly affair, in which spirituality seem to have nothing to do with this world, rather, he is talking about a mission from below in which the excluded people from social structures of power through pedagogical theological education are empowered to engage in their struggle with God for their emancipation and envision a new just world order. This can only happen in the sphere of renewed spirituality, which issues in solidarity of the excluded for their liberation. Yet Pobee is also aware that this kind of theological education is only possible in an ecumenical environment. It is clear

¹⁰² Pobee and Bosch, “Workshop,” 68.

¹⁰³ Pobee and Bosch, “Workshop,” 68.

¹⁰⁴ John S. Pobee, “Perspectives for Ecumenical Formation Tomorrow,” *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 48, Issue 4, (October 1996), 483–490, 488.

¹⁰⁵ John S. Pobee, “Mission from Below,” *Mission Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, (January 1993), 148-170, 167-168.

that authentic theological education should motivate and empower people to engage in liberation and social reconstruction.

2.7. Ecumenical Imperative, Catalyst for Social Transformation

Pobee is of the conviction that ecumenism is not an option for the churches but a gospel imperative and theological education fosters the development of the ecumenical imperative and praxis founded in scripture, as well as the formation of persons to work in the service of ecumenism¹⁰⁶. This implies that ecumenism is at the core of everything that has to do with life and function of the Church in the world. He argues that ecumenism is a renewal movement composed of diverse groups with a commitment and passion for common action¹⁰⁷. With this idea in mind, Pobee identifies three marks of a renewed ecumenism in theological education. First, theology is marked by holism. In short, the interpenetration of sacred and secular, matter and spirit, individual and community etc. the second mark is similar to the first, that theology must apply itself to every aspect of human life and not only to some selected aspects. Theological education must not lose focus of its spiritual dynamic in its involvement in social action; otherwise the Church will not differ from humanitarian secular organisations. For Pobee, transformation in Africa is impossible without spirituality for African people are “notoriously religious”¹⁰⁸. In other words, spirituality permeates every aspect of African life. Third, churches must live in solidarity; no one should be a spectator. In this sense, theological education has the responsibility to help churches to be in critical solidarity for genuine transformation can only happen when scrupulous attention is given to the ecumenical imperative because it lies at the foundation of critical awareness and renewal of the Church’s engagement in the *Missio Dei*¹⁰⁹. In other words, ecumenism has political impact and influence because it affects the allocation of power and influence¹¹⁰. Thus, it has viability only when understood as incarnational model as it takes seriously the language and the idiom of the field of action¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁶ John S. Pobee, “Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church,” *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 53, Issue 3, (July 2001), 319–332, 319.

¹⁰⁷ Pobee, “Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church,” 320.

¹⁰⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1.

¹⁰⁹ John S. Pobee, “Exploring Together from Diverse Cultures the One Gospel of Hope,” *International Review of Mission*, vol. 84, Issue 334, (July 1995), 259–272, 259.

¹¹⁰ Pobee, “Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church,” 320.

¹¹¹ Pobee, “Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church,” 319.

Pobee further argues that theological education must go beyond a mere reflection, transmitting of information, absorbing facts and figures, and maintaining church structures, it should equip Christians to participation in or doing the word of God. He stresses that Jesus himself was challenging the powers-that-be, injustice and violence, demonstrating that theology and ministry is not only for reflection but involves also critical engagement with social issues¹¹². In other words, the process involves reflection-action and action-reflection. For this process to take shape, theological education must be aware of the existential circumstance of the people it is addressing - numerical strength, economical status, political situation, social issues etc.

In this regard, Pobee identifies some of the crucial issues that must be on the table of ecumenical theological education in contemporary Africa. First, theological education, must engage in mutual dialogue between African culture and the gospel of Christ. In other words, theological education must equip people from different perspectives respectfully to engage in a process of conscious and creative inculturation. This means students must be equipped to wrestling with the gospel and culture debate and this demands a dynamic understanding of and fidelity to African culture¹¹³.

The second crucial issue is that it has to include gender issues and perspectives, not polemically but in order to seek for gender justice in the Church and society¹¹⁴. Pobee observes that in African society, the community and the Church are impoverished because the experiences and the voice of African women are not given their due attention. There have been several publications by African women's theologians,¹¹⁵ yet many African male theologians have consciously disregarded the voice of African women¹¹⁶. Pobee laments that very few women are found in the university departments of theology or religious studies, seminaries and also in top positions in the Church¹¹⁷. Theological education in Africa must

¹¹² Pobee, "Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church," 320-321.

¹¹³ Pobee, "Perspectives for Formation Tomorrow," 484.

¹¹⁴ Pobee, "Perspectives for Formation Tomorrow," 489.

¹¹⁵ See Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, & Mercy A. Oduyoye, (eds.), *Thalitha Qumi: The Proceedings of the Convocation of African Women Theologians*, Ibadan: Daystar University Press, 1990; Nyambura J. Njoroge, *Kiama kia NGO: An African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation*, Accra: Legon Theological Studies, 2000; Hélène Yinda and Marie-France B. Bawunina, *Femmes africaines: le pouvoir de transformer le monde: réflexions des théologiennes*, Yaoundé: SHERPA, 2002.

¹¹⁶ Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "Review Article: In search of 'the true character of African Christian Identity,' Review of the Theology of Kwame Bediako," *Missionalia*, vol. 25, no. 2 (August 1997a), 210-219.

¹¹⁷ Pobee, "En Voie Theological Education in Africa," 201.

pay scrupulous attention and come to grips with this creative voice in African theological thought. It is the contribution of African women theologians that have shown African theologians how to criticise oppressive tendencies within African culture without denigrating it, implying that the one does and should not necessarily lead to the other¹¹⁸. Thus, if we seek to envision a new Church in Africa in which women are more than one half and the vibrant, energetic part - then the ecumenical theological education agenda, which defines the Church should seriously engage African women's theologies¹¹⁹.

Third, ecumenical theological education needs to address critically socio-political and economic issues in Africa, work for reconciliation and together face up to the challenges the world poses to faith and religious institutions such as civil wars in Africa, unemployment, poverty, unrest, sexism, ageism, HIV and AIDS, ecological crisis etc¹²⁰. These issues can only be tackled effectively in an ecumenical response.

Fourth, "in Africa the old ideology of Christendom is out of place because of the reality of religious pluralism"¹²¹. Pobee observes that religious pluralism makes churches vulnerable to political expediency, not to mention tensions, strife and persecution. He believes that eradicating the ideology of power, especially in Africa, is a precondition for envisioning a new Church¹²². This means the ecumenical theological education must commit itself to explicating God's revelation in a pluralistic manner and world-view. Pobee stresses that "theological education in Africa needs to be more than conscious of the context of pluralism, which is all to be brought under the sovereignty of God through Christ"¹²³. Thus, theological education should be at the centre of fostering dialogue between different religious persuasions, in an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and peace. Pobee observes that doing theology in a context of plurality also forces the Church to adopt a new understanding of the "uniqueness" of Christ. Pobee argues that he opts for "uniqueness" of Christ rather than "finality" and "absoluteness" because the latter has imperialistic implication¹²⁴. This must be refurbished, however, by a theology of plurality, as there are also

¹¹⁸ Maluleke, "Half a Century of Africa Christian Theologies" 22.

¹¹⁹ Pobee, "Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church," 329.

¹²⁰ Pobee, "Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church," 330.

¹²¹ Pobee, "Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church," 325.

¹²² Pobee, "Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church," 326.

¹²³ Pobee, "En Voie Theological Education in Africa," 200.

¹²⁴ Pobee, "Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church," 326-327.

plural religions, cultures and ethics in Africa¹²⁵. An open question remains: does theology of plurality not entail the danger of relativism and obscure the normativity of Christianity? Nevertheless, theology of plurality seems to be the only plausible approach in contemporary Africa because of its firm appreciation of the inherent richness and diversity of humankind as a manifold ways God deal with creation.

Fifth, ecumenical theological education in Africa must pay attention to the issues of publication. Pobee observes that in the past, issues of Africa and Africans were written about by Western scholars, who usually projected their own philosophical categories on Africans. Thus, for ecumenical engagement to be authentic, it must include every story, identity, different spiritualities of the people in its theological discourse¹²⁶. African young scholars must be mentored for the purpose of publishing ecumenical engagement from African perspectives in order to advance the uniqueness of African scholarship in the global ecumenical family.

2.8. Conclusion

The central task of this chapter was to expose some of the core elements of Pobee's explication of theological education that is focused on social transformation. First the chapter argues that Pobee underpins understanding of theological education in Africa within the reality of African traditional wisdom and ethos of education. Second, Pobee argues for a theological education in which the Gospel engages with the existential question of African people. Third, for Pobee, the mission of God is all embracing in which every Christian participates or struggles with God in the humanization of society. Fourth, ecumenical imperative in theological education is crucial and it needs to be expressed within the cultural idioms and symbols in which the mission of God is taking place. Theological education has responsibility to address the foreignness of Christianity in African by translating ecumenism in African culture. In the proceeding chapter I evaluate some of these core insights in Pobee's thinking in order to envision an African theological education for social transformation.

¹²⁵ Pobee, "Exploring Together from Diverse Cultures the One Gospel of Hope," 269.

¹²⁶ Pobee, "Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church," 331.

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: AN EVALUATION OF THEOLOGICAL THOUGHTS OF JOHN S. POBEE

...education must be an instrument of transforming action, as a political praxis at the service of permanent human liberation. This does not happen only in the consciousness of people but presupposes a radical change of structures in which consciousness will itself be transformed

Paulo Freire¹²⁷.

3.1. Introduction

The preceding chapter exposed some of the core elements of Pobee's theological thought in terms of his approach to theological education for social transformation. The chapter demonstrates that Pobee underpinned his understanding of theological education on the epistemology of critical reflection-action and action-reflection framework. Such a suggestion stresses the fact that theological education is a way of critical participation in on-going process of recreating and liberating work of God. In other words, through theological education God with human agents struggle for justice and liberation. In this way, theological education with critical praxis-oriented methodological process of critical reflection can be a force not only for individual conscientization, but also for social transformation.

The task of the present chapter is to evaluate Pobee's thoughts in order to find ways of developing them further for an African theological education for social transformation. The first section of this chapter explicates the concept of transformation, underpinning it on knowing the truth and becoming free. This is followed by an evaluation of Pobee Christocentric approach to theological education in the light of the changing religious landscape and existential issues in Africa. Finally, the chapter presents an African ecumenism of life as a paradigm for social transformation.

¹²⁷ Paulo Freire, "Education, Liberation and the Church," *Religious Education*, vol. 79, issue 4, (fall 1984), 524-545, 544-545.

3.2. Theology of Social Transformation

The foundation of a liberating mission of social transformation is the mission of God exemplified by Jesus Christ. The foundation character of God's transforming activity defines the place of human role in the activities of social transformation. Social transformation is primarily the activity in which God invites the Church to participate as an agent of God's love. A paradigm for social transformation lies in the fact that the inclusive Christ liberates all people in society. In fact, by emphasising the concept of "theology by the people", Pobee was already situating theological education within the locus of liberation.

There is logic in Pobee's argument about a Western theology moratorium. As long as Western theology remains a norm in Africa, the prophetic role of theological education will continue to be suppressed and its call to bear testimony to the fullness of life and justice is curtailed because Western theological reflections cannot answer the existential questions of the African continent. This is not meant to undermine Western epistemology but to show that the contexts of theologizing are too different and both deserve distinctive approaches. Like in many contexts, in African context, it is important that issues such as power relations, class, gender, ethnicity, and religion be addressed in theological education through critical pedagogies that promotes social transformation.

Yet, Pobee's view of social transformation presents some limitations of special concern for African theological education. First, he did not give enough attention to the *correlation between theological education and justice* in occasioning social transformation. Justice is both a prerequisite for and a result of social transformation. There can be no full realisation of human dignity and equality and social transformation if the issues of justice are neglected. Jon Sobrino rightly argues that justice is that concrete form of love, which "seeks to effectively humanize, to give life in abundance to the poor and oppressed...it is a form of love that is indispensable if the reign of God is to become a historical reality or if there is to be within history a reflection of the trans-historical utopian reality of the reign"¹²⁸. Therefore, justice is necessary and crucial for transformation. The mission of God itself is a mission of justice. That is why it leads to solidarity with the excluded people.

¹²⁸ Cited in Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology*, 128.

Second, he did not *link social transformation to the issues of ecological preservation*. Pobee relates the biblical concept of *Imago Dei* to African communitarian ethos and shows its implication on ecological responsibility. Yet he seems to work within domination and dominated framework where human beings are perceived as exercising “dominion or rule” over creation under God¹²⁹. Developing the thought from Gen. 1:28, Pobee contends that Adam was authorized to ‘rule . . . over every living creature’ and here “the language of *dominion comes into its own*. But it is often forgotten that the *dominion or rule* is to be exercised under God”¹³⁰. This can easily misinterpreted as classical theological model, which was grounded in “anthropocentrism and androcentrism, a sense of human detachment from and superiority over a passive creation because human beings occupy a higher place in the created hierarchy and domineering conceptions of power”¹³¹. This approach contradicts the African ecosystem ethic and many other contemporary theologians¹³² who recognise the interdependent and interrelatedness of all creatures. It can be argued that Pobee did not manage to overcome anthropometric view of creation. One remains wondering to what extent theological education in Africa is envisioned on the premises that there is goodness and equality in all of God’s creation? This is significant because theological education in contemporary Africa with enormous ecological deterioration may need to be grounded in divine love for all creation in order to avoid oppressive tendencies against nonhuman creation. Social transformation cannot be based entirely on humanity it must be extended to the community of all creation. In actual fact, the majority of African people have always regarded human beings as one with creation, sharing life with all other creation in the wholeness of community of kinship¹³³. I therefore, argue that African theological education must conceptualise the concept of social transformation as an inclusive of both humanity and nonhuman creation and underpinned on African understanding of an inclusive community of all creation. This implies conscientization in theological education should lead to structural, systematic and institutional transformation. The purpose of life is to let people become fully human and the learning process is the crucial part of transformation. This does not any way

¹²⁹ John S. Pobee, “Creation Faith and Responsibility for the World,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, vol. 50, (March, 1985): 16-26. 20

¹³⁰ Pobee, “Creation Faith and Responsibility for the World,” 20 (italics mine).

¹³¹ Scott A. Dunham, *The Trinity and Creation in Augustine: An Ecological Analysis*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2008, 13.

¹³² Sally McFague, *The Body of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1993.

¹³³ Chammah J. Kaunda, “Creation as a Dwelling Place of God: A Critical Analysis of an African Biocentric Theology in the works of Gabriel M. Setiloane,” MTh. Thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 2010, 40.

exclude other forms of education. In fact, contemporary education is becoming more and more interdisciplinary. Yet a social transforming theological education is based on critical dialogue and confrontation with the systemic forces that perpetuate oppression and exploitation.

3.3. Embracing an Inclusive Framework

African theological education must underpin Christocentric universality model on an inclusive, embracing and ecological model of doing theology in the community. Pobee seems to operate within a Christocentric universality model. In fact, this model limits to a large extent Pobee's desire for ecumenical imperative in theological education. The model is limited in the sense that it does not take into account the events of world history. Christocentric universality approach to mission is based exclusively on the work of Jesus and did not take into account sufficiently the work of the Father and the Spirit in their interrelatedness. The Christocentric universalism was in some cases developed "in a christomonistic imperialism and oppressive expansionism"¹³⁴. This implies that Christocentric universality as a connotation of control and Lordship of Christ over the history of the world. In addition, there was a level of manipulation of Christ on the part of the powerful with its corresponding distortion of his message and the justification¹³⁵ of imperialism and colonization which resulted in acute oppression and exploitation of African people.

In his seminal work, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement*, Konrad Raiser expounds the 'Christocentric-universalist' model in terms of four features¹³⁶. First, the "all-determining central element in the paradigm is a deliberate Christocentrism" that highlights the divinity and Lordship of Christ over the all creation. A second component is a "concentration on the church" that accents the unique identity and task of the Church. The third characteristic is the universal perspective. The Christ event has universal significance, and therefore the Church's being and mission also has universal validity. The final element is its emphasis on salvation history and eschatology as a central

¹³⁴Petros Vassiliadis, "Reconciliation as a Pneumatological Mission Paradigm: some Preliminary Reflections by an Orthodox," *International Review of Mission*, vol. 94, no. 372, (Jan 2005), 30-42, 31.

¹³⁵ Sobrino cite in Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology*, 72-73.

¹³⁶Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991, 41-46.

category of thought. A dynamic conception of universal history links together the Christocentrism, the focus on the Church, and the universalism of the paradigm.

Building on this understanding, Raiser stresses that this paradigm is facing serious challenges and has been brought in question. This is especially true when looking at the contemporary African landscape. It seems to me that current African landscape demands a paradigm that is inclusive enough to accommodate numerous historical developments that have shaped the continent in last decades. Pobee's Christocentric conceptualisation of theological education and African Christianity, as Raiser observes, was essential after the Second World War, because it provided a vision of the Church's nature and purpose in the aftermath of Christendom, and was effective in both challenging the "cultural religion" of Western Protestantism and in opposing Nazi regime¹³⁷. However, Raiser has observed, the paradigm has lost its efficaciousness as a result of several historical developments. Africa is experiencing unprecedented growth of religious pluralism, the concern for ecological degradation that challenges human survival, the ethnic, cultural diversities and diversification within Christian denominations among several existential challenges are constantly calling for new ways of approaching theological education. Proposing for the 'uniqueness of Christ',¹³⁸ as a new paradigm does not in any way overcome the limitation inherent in the Christocentric paradigm.

In the light of this diagnosis of the contemporary situation, Raiser proposes a paradigm of interrelatedness of all life that helps to unfold the notion *koinonia*/communion both in its vertical and horizontal dimensions¹³⁹. He compares his metaphor to the "'round table' in the 'open house' as an expression of 'neighbourliness' among ordinary people and as a symbol of 'hospitality' turning towards the 'other', becoming a mark of the Christian community as a 'household' within civil society, which is itself dependent on the processes of sustenance and regeneration in the one household of life"¹⁴⁰. This shift to relational paradigm does not in any way marginalise the centrality of Christ in mission; it is rather underpin it within its critical relation to the Trinitarian framework which expresses God in communion and the world as

¹³⁷ Konrad Raiser, "Ecumenism in Search of a New Vision, 1992", in M. Kinnamon and B.E. Cope (eds), *The Ecumenical Movement – An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, Geneva: WCC, 1997-70-77, 70.

¹³⁸ Pobee, "Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church," 326-327.

¹³⁹ Raiser, "Ecumenism in Search of a New Vision," 76.

¹⁴⁰ Raiser, "Ecumenism in Search of a New Vision," 76.

God's *oikoumene*. This communion conceptualization of God is seen as the basis for human social relationships. In this perspective salvation is seen at four points: in economic justice against exploitation; in human dignity against political oppression; in solidarity against alienation; in hope against despair in personal life and all creation¹⁴¹.

The significance of the emerging paradigm is that it has an affinity with African world-view. First, in an African understanding, the emerging paradigm is the "community of life"¹⁴². This is a community in which life is considered the highest value and every creature is treated with respect and dignity on the account of sharing the same life from the Ultimate Source who is God. This is in contrast to the "community of death" in which some human beings and nonhuman creation is denied the fullness life, a context of domination, where people live for themselves (individualism) and justice and power are distorted and corrupted¹⁴³.

African people believe that *life*, the very essence of community, is a gift from the same Creator who is Life itself (see the diagram below). God is understood as the Life present in all existence. This "underscores the fact that human beings participate in a vital-web-of-life with nonhuman nature and are not outside or above nature, but a family unit with equal rights to live"¹⁴⁴. The motto is *our* life and not *my* life. The sharing itself in this Life, which is Divine is the foundation for affirmation of intrinsic value of all existence and the basis for true communication (see 3.4). Thus, there is critical solidarity in the community. Gabriel Setiloane highlights that "the success of life is found in the ability to maintain a healthy relationship with all"¹⁴⁵. "To maintain a healthy relationship" in the community of creation means that all members are perceived to have intrinsic value as creation loved by God and not seen in terms of their utility function. All creation has its own inherent value beyond their utility function. This does not mean that all human beings become vegetarians but a rejection of violent treatment of animals and perceiving them only in terms of their instrumental value for human consumption and thereby strip them off their intrinsic value. Second, the metaphor

¹⁴¹ Bangkok Assembly, *Minutes and Report of the Assembly of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches December 31, 1972 and January 9-12, 1973*. New York: WCC Publications Service, 1973, 89.

¹⁴² Sindima, *Africa's Agenda*: 213.

¹⁴³ Sindima, *Africa's Agenda*: 213.

¹⁴⁴ Kaunda, "Creation as a Dwelling Place of God," 40

¹⁴⁵ Gabriel M. Setiloane, "Towards a Biocentric theology and ethic — via Africa," C.W. du Toit (ed.), *Faith, science & African culture. African cosmology and Africa's contribution to science*, Pretoria: UNISA, 1998b, 73-84, 79.

stresses the “bondedness” and interrelatedness of the community of life in which the Triune God is the centre of universal history and the Church is the agent in the process of realising the principles of the kingdom of God on earth. Third, the Church is perceived as one community among many communities (religions, nonhuman creation etc.) in *diapaxis*¹⁴⁶ (dialogue in action) within the household of God. These communities are neither inferior nor superior to one another but equal and valid in their own rights. This makes it possible for different members of the same family to share their lives, struggles, and pains together, by working together creatively for social transformation. This perspective resonates African understanding of all life as a web of interaction and the emphasis on family as the ultimate grounding factor of all existence. In African understanding of family, everyone regardless of ‘abnormalities,’ difference and behaviour remains accepted and respected as a member of the family deserving equal respect and love. This means that in the interrelatedness paradigm, difference is not perceived as *threat* but as *strength* of the family and essential for well-being of the community of God. Thus, interrelatedness of all things becomes a locus for doing theological education in the community. I therefore, argue that if theological education is to become relevant in Africa, it must be grounded in the model of interrelatedness of life.

3.4. Africanization, Contextualization or *Skenosis*: In Search of a Paradigm

The contemporary circumstances African people are facing require a radical rejection of life-denying theological education¹⁴⁷ and grounding theological education on social transformation. Pobee struggled with the methods of Africanization and contextualization. On the former, he argues that it was preoccupied with political rights and it focused on putting Africans where Europeans used to be without transforming the old systems¹⁴⁸. The simplicity of this argument cannot be accepted unquestioningly, especially that some African theologians have posited that Africanization of Christianity is the new task facing African theology¹⁴⁹. Although this perception also falls prey to dualism or artificial separation of the

¹⁴⁶ John S. Pobee, “Good news turned by native hands, Turned by Native Hatchet and Tended with Native Earth: Theological Education in Africa: A History,” Unpublished article, no date, 1-14, 2.

¹⁴⁷ Life –denying theologies such as the theology of apartheid that justified sexism, racism, capitalism and totalitarianism in South Africa or the theologies of the missionaries that were based on the perception of cultural superior of western society, African cultures and religions as inferior and worked hard to vanquish them.

¹⁴⁸ Pobee, *Skenosis*, 39.

¹⁴⁹ Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 4.

process of Africanization and Christianization, which are perceived by many African theologians as one and the same task¹⁵⁰.

Second, Pobee found the concept of contextualisation as problematic, because it does not add to the clarity and precision of the theological discourse (see chapter 2.3). He remarks that according to Lesslie Newbigin the meaning of contextualization was being altered by the process, which started with the problem of the community and preceded to formulate a theology, resulting in a programme or crusade rather than ‘good news’, law rather gospel¹⁵¹. In other words, Newbigin believes that the gospel is not to be read in the light of the culture but the culture in the light of the gospel. Pobee was influenced by Newbigin’s articulation of the notion. Yet one can argue that the fact, that the concept has been misconstrued does not necessitate its dismissal because every concept is prone to such misinterpretations. In fact, Newbigin’s argument seems to be a true interpretation of the meaning of contextualization within African theological reflection which starts with the incarnation. According to this understanding, transforming theology is always underpinned on *experiences* of the community and *responds* to the existential questions of that particular community. In other words, contextualization should start with the incarnation or the context. Thus, Pobee in calling for an approach that starts with the revelation seems to contradict himself especially in the context of calling for a theology by the people.

In fact, *Skenosis* according to Pobee’s explication of it (see 2.3) has to do with the incarnation, which is a process of articulating Jesus Christ as the Good News emerging out of the contextual experiences of Jesus as a Jew who was interpreted and perceived as a Jew. In this sense, Jesus himself was embedded within the Jewish context. In the same way any relevant theological education expresses its context. African theology is both developed from and responses to the experiences of social, political and economic injustice. It seems therefore that the concept of *Skenosis* is implied in the word contextualization, which is more embracing and encompassing. Thus, contextualization must be understood as a process itself that facilitates that process of Africanization of Christianity.

¹⁵⁰Maluleke, “Half a Century of African Christian Theologies,” 12-13

¹⁵¹Pobee, *Skenosis*, 25.

Tinyiko Maluleke¹⁵² has argued that for theological education to be African in its total outlook and ethos, it must be Africanized. Africanization is a follow-up process after decolonization in order to make theological education express African world-view and wisdom in every aspect such as philosophy, curriculum and structure. This does not mean a complete rejection of all aspects of Western cultural attributes since there is no culture that is monolithic and cultures are constantly shaping one another through cross-cultural encounter. Thus, in this study Africanization is understood in terms of giving theological education a distinctively African shape by enshrining it within cultural practices/ideals such as community. In fact, this is the basis of a theological education for social transformation. It is my contention that Africanized theological education for social transformation will be grounded on Maluleke's six-fold qualifiers. First, Africanization of theological education is a moral choice and an on-going process. This means that Africanization is not self-evident but rather a matter of conscious awareness that demands a choice and decision on part of African theologians to engage in the process of Africanization. It is a process that African theologians must undertake consciously and deliberately by allowing the grassroots people to become the main players in formulating theologies of liberation and reconstruction. Second, it is about liberation and emancipation of every member of the whole African community, but specifically those who have been excluded from the centres of socio-political, economical and religious privileges.

Third, it is not enough therefore, to sugar-coat theological courses and institutions with African symbols and persons, it is not enough to inculturate and indigenise, it is not enough to merely present foreign ideologies in African forms while the ideas left intact. This is more than a change of form but content, aims or objectives and visions in order to develop a theological education that reflects or corresponds genuinely with African reality with the ideal of emancipating those Africans confronted with challenges and lead them to self-reconstruction for a sustainable livelihood and development. It is theological education for justice.

Four, it is about critically looking at the profile of the teacher and the institutional structure through which theological education is mediated. A transformative theological education is

¹⁵² See Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "The Africanization of Theological Education: Does Theological Education Equip you to Help your Sister?" Edward P. Antonio (ed.), *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse in African Theology*, New York: Peter Lang, 2006, 61-76, 72-74.

not a male reserved position. Institutions must aim at being gender-sensitive and practice gender justice at all levels. In fact, the institutions themselves must be just. This is more than writing and speaking good things about justice and equality while conducting a conflictive lifestyle that denies justice to others. The invisibility of women and persons with disabilities is still worrying in African theological education. African traditional education allowed for the participation of every member of the community in the process of educating an individual.

Fifth, it is not to return to the African past, though it signifies the love and affirmation of African identity. There is a clear recognition especially in African women's theologies of the patriarchy and oppressive tendencies against women in African cultures and religions. Africanization is not a cultural romanticism but serves a theological education that will critically analyse cultures and religions in the light of a liberation ethos. It has political implications because it deals with concrete experiences of African people in the world structure to benefit powerful nations. Africanization should also give a serious attention to the theology of children and the constructive African religio-cultural contribution as foundation on which theological education can build.

Finally, Africanization is not only multifaceted and complex ideological process but also a very contentious one. It demands sensitivity to diversities in African context. It is significant to bear in mind that Africa has always existed in diversity and yet, this diversity was based on equity and justice for all members of the society. I therefore, argue that African theological education, for it to be a force for social transformation, it must apply itself to the process of contextualization paying particular attention to motifs of *Skenosis*, incarnation, conception, understood and being given birth by African ethos and outlook¹⁵³. The African theological education will seek in every situation to appropriate centrality of the African cultural and religious heritage with an understanding that culture is neither static nor monolithic but always transforming itself through encounters with various cultures without losing its uniqueness and authenticity. I submit that this is the grounding of an African theological

¹⁵³The incarnation of Jesus Christ demanded conception, being given birth by a woman within a particular culture and develop within that culture so that he can return the worldview. This is significant because anything can claim to be incarnated without having any resemblance with the people in which incarnation is taking place. One can only be authentically African by being born and raised within that cultural worldview.

education for social transformation. Consequently, this kind of theological education demands clarity on the kind of ecumenical framework required as its locus.

3.5. Ecumenism of Life: Paradigm for Social Transformation

Pobee argues that the notion of ecumenism must incarnate in the cultural language and idiom of the field of God mission¹⁵⁴. Yet he did not endeavour to translate or incarnate the notion of ecumenism in African culture. One would have expected that it is in this context that he should have tested the feasibility of the concept of *Skenosis* as it relates to African wisdom and philosophy of ecumenical lifestyle. It is my argument therefore, that ecumenism to be viable needs to be inculturated, for social transformation is expressed and carried out through cultural symbols or idioms. While on the one hand, universality of the notion of ecumenism should be acknowledged and affirmed, on the other hand, its expression is grounded within the cultural historical processes of the context. In other words, both universality and particularity lie at the roots of Christianity and contribute mutually to the authentic expression of Christianity as it both translates into any human culture, while at the same time it transcends all human culture. Thus, focusing on cultural embodiments of ecumenical ethos does not suggest that they are perfect or sidelining the universal dimension of Christianity, it is rather to show that they are crucial for local people's actualization of ecumenism. Besides, the local values of ecumenism need to be in constant mutual dialogue and critical engagement with the universal values to avoid both the *sectarian and narrowness* of the local values and also to guard against *imperialistic and colonialist* tendencies of the universal values. It is within this intricate balance of the local and global dimensions of ecumenism that theological education for social transformation is engendered.

Thus, African theologians¹⁵⁵ have suggested the metaphor of “family” as a model for ecumenism in Africa. The concept of the family must be perceived as a component of African people's life centred worldview¹⁵⁶. Sindima asserts that for “the African, life is the primary

¹⁵⁴ Pobee, “Ecumenical Formation in the Service of the Renewed Church,” 319.

¹⁵⁵ See Peter Uche Uzochukwu, “Towards a More Ecumenically Oriented Christianity in Africa: The Contribution of the Roman Catholic Church,” PhD Thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2008 and Mercy A. Oduyoye, “The African Family as a Symbol of Ecumenism,” *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 43, issue 4, (October 1991), 465-478.

¹⁵⁶ Harvey J. Sindima, “Community of Life: Ecological Theology in African Perspective,” posted no date, accessed on 19th December, 2011, website: <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2327>.

category for self-understanding and provides the basic framework for any interpretation of the world, persons, nature, or divinity”¹⁵⁷.

To avoid generalization, one prefers to appeal for metaphors from a group of people whose categories are understood without too much effort; the Bemba people of Zambia. The Bemba people are life oriented. They live in *ukwampana kwamweo* (ecumenism of life or united through oneness of life). According to these people, *umweo* (life) which is the *Mweo* (Divine) principle in *umweo* (all existence) is the cohesion factor of the *Ubuntu* (equivalent to the community). *Umweo*, which is pervasive in all existence, is the very principle of connectedness. It is the overriding principle of the community. God is *Mweo*, the shared principle of all creation. An individual becomes only *umuntu* (human) in relation to *Ubuntu*. One is not *umuntu* if he/she is living for self (individualism) or is perceived as *ichiswango* (anything that harms life/against life), because he/she is no longer connected to the *Ubuntu*. Notwithstanding, individuals are also bearers of the communal values. The interrelatedness has thus a double direction and would serve to underline the intrinsic dignity of every individual and rights he/she may derive from this without disrupting the community bonds. In essence, *umweo* means not just living (biologically) but also to participate in the essence of *Ubuntu* (community). Thus, *umweo* is the essence of existence and the grounding principle of *ubuntu* (humanness). In this world-view, nonhuman nature (*umweo*) is conceptualised as family with equal values like any other human being. It is also perceived as *umuntu* because it enhances life. In other words, to be *umuntu* is not grounded on nationality, gender, race or colour but by virtual of personal choice to live in *ukwikatana* (holding one another in solidarity). *Ubuntu* category is a unit of mutual interdependence and acceptance that adjusts itself naturally to new people (*abeni*) who are willing to participate in the promotion of life through humanization of society. In this understanding, the issue of ecumenism of life is about self-transcendence of *umweo*. It is about a quest for abundant life for existence. It is a conscious realisation that all existence shares the same grounding principle and this creates the possibility for realization¹⁵⁸ of *umuntu*. Since the basic values are mediated by social systems and moral of life, to ensure that these systems will permit fullness of *umweo*, the grounding principle of *Ubuntu*, principles of justice and solidarity were perceived as crucial. Holding one another's hands and upholding the intrinsic values of all existence were crucial

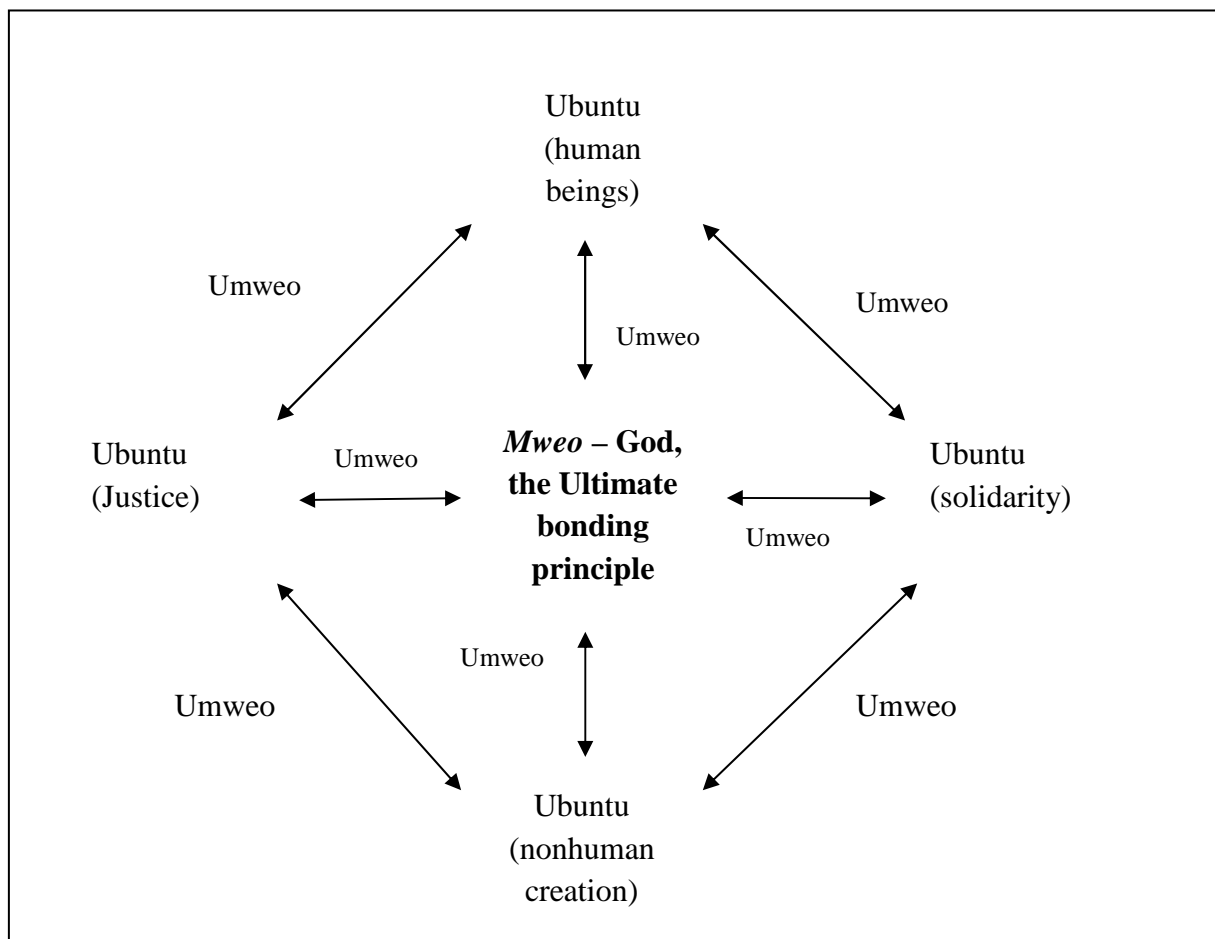
¹⁵⁷ Sindima, “Community of Life: Ecological Theology in African Perspective,” website: <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2327>.

¹⁵⁸ Sindima, *Africa's Agenda*, 212.

for the realising of the fullness of life. An ecumenism of life prioritizes life-together “for the purpose of allowing life to flow and for the purpose of creating possibilities for achieving”¹⁵⁹ *umuntu*. However, the fractures, disunity and disagreements, imperfections etc. also belong to the fullness of life at least in its present form. This is to show that there are contradictions and various interpretations of lifestyle within this ideal of life. Sometimes there is no solidarity only conflict and misunderstanding; but that is what it means to be human in the community life and this does not mean that the ideal-typical framework of life-together is not valid. For justice (*umulinganya*) is grounded on a sense of the connectedness and oneness of life which demands solidarity of all creation to meaningfully actualize humaneness. This can be illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 1¹⁶⁰

The Ecumenism of life



¹⁵⁹ Sindima, “Community of Life: Ecological Theology in African Perspective”.

¹⁶⁰ The figure is based on Sindima’s idea. See, Sindima, *Africa’s Agenda*, 213.

Therefore, social transformation should begin with life, the coherent factor of ecumenism. The figure above represents the ideas about ecumenism of life as the basis of a theological education for social transformation. *Umweo* appears on every bond because it is not only the foundation and purpose of all creation but also a cohesive social entity and the grounding principle of ecumenism. Everything is engulfed in *Mweo* (God) who permeates all existence and regulates it as *Umweo*. The health of an ecumenism of life is based on generosity, sharing, mutuality, dignity and acceptance without demanding uniformity. These are necessary for just peace and harmonious living and the grounding principles of a theological education for social transformation. This means that African theological education must wrestle to establish the ecumenical metaphors of the targeted communities in order to be relevant in its reflection. Yet, it is my contention that the ecumenism of life for theological education is a theme relevant for global Christianity but it is only through the particularity of Christianity that it becomes tangible and the Bemba people's expression as shown above is one such tangible ways in which the notion becomes meaningful.

3.6. Conclusion

The chapter argues that theological education is a way of critical participation in on-going process of recreating and liberating work of God. It is a way of partnering with God in struggle for the humanization of the *oikos*. This demands that African theological education conceptualises the concept of social transformation to include both humanity and nonhuman creation and underpinned on African understanding of an inclusive community of all creation. The chapter has argued that if theological education is to become relevant in Africa, the paradigm of Christocentric universalism need to be complemented by the paradigm of interrelatedness of all life. It further argues for contextual articulating of ecumenism exemplified within the Bemba concept of *umweo* (life) as the grounding principle of an ecumenism of life. Local metaphors of ecumenism can no longer be conceptualised in isolation from universal metaphors of ecumenical imperatives, there is a need for mutual interaction and engagement between the two in order to keep an intricate balance between them and it is where one finds an ecumenism of life for a theological education designed for social transformation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study was to respond to the question: *what is the missiological significance of John Samuel Pobee's understanding of theological education in Africa?* Through the finding, it has shown that John Pobee's theological thoughts are valuable for envisioning social transformation in Africa. The following are a few recommendations for a theological education for social transformation; First, I would recommend that African theological education must be critically informed by and respond to the existential issues of African people in their specific cultural settings. Second, it must be Africanize. This means that theological education will be life centred and praxis-oriented. It requires ecumenical imperative, which requires tools for social analysis and models for thinking theologically in order to occasion renewal in the Church for the purpose of social transformation. Third, it must be understood as a way of critical participation in on-going process of recreating and liberating work of God. In which human beings partner with God in struggle for the humanization of the *oikos*. This means that if theological education is to become relevant in Africa, it must complete the paradigm of Christocentric universalism with the paradigm of interrelatedness of all life. Fourth, contextual articulation of ecumenism within various expressions of African wisdom and philosophy must be perceived crucial for theological education because every culture has categories of through which the notion of ecumenism can be expressed. This means that there is an urgent need for empirical studies in different African ethnic groups in order to retrieve indigenous concepts and metaphors of ecumenism. Yet, the local metaphors of ecumenism must not be conceptualised in isolation from universal metaphors of ecumenical metaphor. The two must always mutually engage each other to avoid sectarianism and imperialism. This seems crucial for grounding an African theological education for social transformation.

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